

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6879
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USNMR SHAPE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BONN 04965

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR, MASS, MMOL, MPOL, GW, ET, IT, UR
SUBJECT: REPORT OF GERMAN TANKS IN ETHIOPIA

1. THE MARCH 16, 1978 ISSUE OF THE WEEKLY NEWS
MAGAZINE STERN CARRIED A SHORT ARTICLE CLAIMING THAT
THE SOVIET UNION TESTED THE GERMAM-DESIGNED "LEOPARD I"
TANK IN THE OGADEN REGION OF ETHIOPIA. STERN CLAIMS
THAT AT LEAST FIVE SUCH TANKS, ALL
WITH SOVIET CREWS, WERE USED ALONGSIDE THE ETHIOPIAN
FORCES AGAINST THE SOMALIS, WHO ALLEGEDLY DESTROYED
ONE.

2. STERN STATES THAT LIBYAN CHIEF OF STATE, QADHAFI,
SUCCEEDED IN OBTAINING THE TANKS LAST YEAR FROM THE
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ITALIAN FIRM OTO-MELARA WHICH PRODUCES THEM UNDER A
FRG LICENSING AGREEMENT. QADHAFI ALLEGEDLY PURCHASED
THE TANKS SOMETIME LAST SUMMER FOR THREE TIMES THE
LIST PRICE. THEY WERE SHIPPED TO LIBYA BY SEA BETWEEN
NOVEMBER 1977 AND JANUARY 1978 AND, UPON ARRIVAL,
TAKEN OVER BY SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL. STERN ADDS
THAT THE SOVIETS WERE INTERESTED IN TESTING THE MTU

ENGINE, THE 105 MM SMOOTH-BORE CANNON AND THE NIGHT VISION EQUIPMENT IN OGADEN BATTLE CONDITIONS. ONE OF THE "LEOPARDS" WAS ALLEGEDLY DISASSEMBLED AND FLOWN TO MOSCOW.

3. THE FMOD HAS ISSUED A STRONG DENIAL THAT THE "LEOPARDS" IN QUESTION ARE OF GERMAN MANUFACTURE.

4. FOREIGN OFFICE SOURCES ALSO DENY THAT THE TANKS ARE OF GERMAN MANUFACTURE AND ASSERT THAT BONN HAS NOT GIVEN ITS APPROVAL TO ANY SUCH SALES FROM ITALIAN PRODUCTION. OUR CONTACTS ARE RELUCTANT TO STATE, HOWEVER, THAT THE REPORTED TRANSFER FROM ITALY TO LIBYA COULD NOT HAVE TAKEN PLACE. THEY NOTE THAT THE STERN STORY CAUSED BONN TO INITIATE SEVERAL HIGH LEVEL INQUIRIES ON THE SUBJECT WITH THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT.

5. COMMENT: THE "LEOPARD I" IS PRODUCED IN ITALY UNDER A FRG LICENSING AGREEMENT BY THE FIRM OF OTO-MELARA WITH THE ACTUAL PRODUCTION BEING DONE BY FIAT AND LANCIA. TO DATE 600 "LEOPARD I'S" HAVE BEEN PRODUCED IN ITALY, WITH ADDITIONAL 300 COPIES SCHEDULED FOR PRODUCTION. ACCORDING TO THE FOREIGN OFFICE, THE LICENSING AGREEMENT SPECIFICALLY FORBIDS TRANSFERS TO THIRD COUNTRIES WITHOUT FRG APPROVAL.

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OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, THIS EMBASSY HAS HEARD AND THROUGH DOD CHANNELS REPORTED RUMORS THAT "LEOPARDS" HAD REACHED THE AFRICAN CONTINENT. WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ADDRESSEES MAY HAVE ON THIS SUBJECT.
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